

Syrian Army 1967

On the surface the Syrian's were able to field a substantial army by 1967, though it was to be found lacking in equipment and training with much of the equipment of World War II vintage.

As France increased sales of equipment to Israel in the 1950's it felt compelled to supply more useful equipment to the Syrians to maintain a balance between the two nations. To this end a number of reconditioned German vehicles were supplied in some numbers. These included PzKpfw IV Ausf H and a limited number of Stug IIIs and JagdPanzer IVs. However, as the Syrian moved towards the left the French influence was replaced by that of the Soviets.



This "new" Soviet equipment included initially numbers of T-34/85s which, along with the PzIVHs, were involved in the 1964 "Winter War". This in turn resulted in the supply of T-54s to replace and supplement the T-34s. By 1967 the Syrians fielded some 750 tanks and 585 APCs. At least one mechanised Brigade was formed using BTR-152s and two Armoured Brigades which Zaloga describes as "primarily" equipped with T-54 and T-55s.

Three battalion sized attacks were launched by the Syrians into Israel on the 6th of June. Each was supported by 15-20 tanks. They were directed at the Israeli settlements of Tel Dan, Kibbutz Dan and She'ar Yashuv in the extreme north eastern corner of Israel. There was only one Syrian infantry brigade in the front line in this sector so it is possible that this was completely allocated to these attacks or it used reserve formations initially held back behind line. The tank numbers indicate more than one tank battalion was involved.

Zaloga provides a summary of the more unusual ex-German vehicles in Syrian service. It would seem that France supplied between 40 reconditioned vehicles consisting of PzKpfw IV, Jagdpanzer IV and Stug IIIs. Later more PzKpfw IVs were purchased from Czechoslovakia and Spain. In his book, Tank Battles of the Middle East Wars Part One, are photographs of Syrian Jagdpanzer IVs (stating they had 6), Hummels (5), Stug III G (28) and Panzer IVs from France (28).



Operations during the Six Day War in the Golan cost the Israelis some 160 tanks. In contrast Syria lost 73 T-34/85s, PzKpfw IVs and T-54s; seven SU-100s; and a few old StuG IIIs. The T-34's, Pz IVH's and Stugs were primarily involved in the fighting, 30 being entrenched in the Golan Heights.

Artillery should be allocated to the brigades as required and would likely follow the organisation defined in the MSH TO&E charts. A large number of guns would however been the older M-1938 122mm guns rather than the newer D-30s. A limited number of BM21 and 130mm guns were also available.

Interestingly, even by 1967 there was no permanent Syrian organisation above the brigade level. This was only changed just prior to the 1973 War when division level formations began to be formed.



Order of Battle & Dispositions:

Golan Defences:

- 8th Infantry Brigade with attached T34 Tank Battalion.
- 11th Infantry Brigade with attached T-34 Tank Battalion
- 19th Infantry Brigade with attached T-34 Tank Battalion Infantry Battalion
- 90th Infantry Brigade with attached T-34 Tank Battalion Infantry Battalion (In reserve north of Qnaitra)
- 32nd Infantry Brigade with attached T-34 Tank Battalion Infantry Battalion (In reserve south of Qnaitra)

Three additional Independent tank battalions, for a total of eight, existed and were allocated to the Golan Front. This total would include the estimated 30 Panzer IV's and Stugs allocated to static defence along the front.

Golan Armoured Reserve:

- 14th Armoured Brigade – (T-54 or T-55)
- 44th Armoured Brigade – (T-54 or T-55)
- Unknown Armoured Brigade (Moved to Golan and allocated to Golan Reserve on the 5th June)
- 17th Mechanised Brigade
- Unknown Mechanised Brigade
- Unknown Mechanised Brigade (Moved to Golan and allocated to Golan Reserve on the 5th June)

Army Level Assets:

265 Artillery pieces were deployed along the Golan. This includes a number of 130mm guns recently arrived and marked with production markings of 1966. In addition a limited number of BM21 were also deployed. Finally, some 200 anti-aircraft guns were positioned along the Golan Heights.

Tables of Organisation & Equipment:

The following TO&E is designed for use with Modern Spearhead rules and supplements the existing TO&E in the rules package.

Syrian formations should be rated as Third World.

Syrian Infantry Brigade	Morale: Green or Regular
Brigade Headquarters: HQ: 1 HQ Stand in Truck <u>1 - Anti Tank Company:</u> 2 - 57mm or 85mm Anti-Tank Gun & Truck <u>1 - Anti Aircraft Battery:</u> 1 - ZPU1 or 37mm AA & Truck <u>3 - Infantry Battalions each with:</u> <u>Battalion Headquarters:</u> 1 - HQ Stand <u>3 - Infantry Company each with:</u> 2 - Rifle stands <u>Heavy Weapons Company:</u> 2 - HMGs 1 - 82mm Mortar	Notes: 1. This TO&E is supposed to be typical only. 2. Trucks are likely to be provided for movement of troops as required, however most formations were in static positions. 3. At least one Mechanised Brigade existed, probably more. The 17th Mechanised Brigade is known to be equipped with BTR-152 APC's while it's Anti-Tank Company used SU-100s rather than towed anti-tank guns. Churchill indicates others may also have had SU-100s

Syrian Independent Tank Battalion	Morale: Green
Battalion Headquarters: HQ: 1 HQ Stand in Tank <u>3 - Tank Companies each with:</u> 3 - Tanks	Notes: 1. Eight Tank battalions existed and were to be used in support of the Infantry Brigades. They can be allocated out as support companies to infantry. 2. Tanks were mostly T34/85, but with some Panzer IVs; StuG III and a handful of JagdPanzer IVs. The Stugs and Panzer IV's may be in weak battalions or, more likely, allocated out by companies for static entrenchments.

Syrian Armoured Brigade	Morale: Green
Brigade Headquarters: HQ: 1 HQ Stand in BTR-152 HQ Defence: 1 - BRDM-1 <u>1 - Recon Company:</u> 2 - BRDM 1 <u>1 - Anti Tank Company:</u> 2 - SU100 Assault Guns <u>1 - Anti Air Company:</u> 1 - ZPU-1 or 37mm AA & Truck <u>3 - Armoured Battalions each with:</u> <u>Battalion Headquarters:</u> HQ: 1 - T54 or T55 <u>3 - Tank Companies each with:</u> 3 - T-54 or T55 <u>1 - Mechanised Battalion with:</u> <u>Battalion Headquarters:</u> 1 - HQ Stand in BTR-152 <u>3 - Mechanized Company each with:</u> 2 - Rifle stands in BTR-152 <u>Heavy Weapons Company:</u> 2 - HMGs in BTR-152 or Trucks 1 - 82mm Mortar & Truck	Notes: 1. The Syrian 14th and 44th Armoured Brigades were formed with T54s or T55s and perhaps some T34/85s. 2. Some sources indicate a third Armoured Brigade existed.

Sources

Churchill, Randolph, The Six Day War, London: Heinemann, 1967.

Zaloga, Steven, *Armour of the Middle East Wars 1948-78*, London: Osprey Publishing, 1981.

Zaloga, Steven, Tank Battles of the Middle East Wars Part One.